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Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00
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C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 9845

USICA

E.O. 11652: N/A
SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION TO AFGHAN COUP

REF: USICA 11835

A. BEING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE FOLLOWING HEAVY FRONT PAGE COVERAGE OF THE EVENTS OF THE AFGHAN COUP, INDIAN PRESS TREATMENT QUICKLY SUBSIDED TO A ROUTINE LEVEL OF INTEREST.

1. INITIAL INDIAN PRESS REPORTING ON THE COUP IN AFGHANISTAN NOTED IT IS TOO EARLY TO ASCRIBE ANY SPECIFIC IDEOLOGY TO THE MILITARY LEADERS. COL. ABDUL QADIR'S STATEMENT ON THE NEW REGIME'S "STRICT" ADHERENCE TO NON-ALIGNMENT AND RESPECT FOR INTERNATIONAL LAW AND THE UN WAS INTERPRETED AS EVIDENCE OF NO "RADICAL SHIFT IN AFGHANISTAN'S EXTERNAL POSTURE" (STATESMAN, APRIL 29. BUT AS SUBSTANTIAL DETAILS (BASED ON PIT, UNI, AP, AND AFP REPORTS AND AND KABUL, TERERAN AND BBC BROADCASTS) ABOUT THE PLANNING AND ORGANIZATION OF THE COUP BEGAN TO APPEAR IN THE PRES, MOST ASSESSMENTS HELD IT WAS A COMMUNIST TAKEOVER. THE EDITORIAL HEADLINE OF THE MAY 4 STATESMAN, "LEFT TURN IN KABUL," REFLECTED CONTENTS. THE INDIAN EXPRESS MAY 4 EDIT, "COMMUNISTS IN KABUL," OBSERVED THE
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"DECISIVE FACTOR WAS THE COMMUNIST SUCCESS IN WINNING OVER A DETERMINED SECTION OF THE ARMED FORCES TO THEIR CAUSE. INTERNATIONAL REACTIONS HAVE CONFIRMED AFGHANISTAN'S SUDDEN SHARP TURN TO THE LEFT."

2. ANALYSTS WERE CAUTIOUS IN ANSWERING THE QUESTION WHETHER THERE WILL BE A MARKED ACCRETION OF MOSCOW'S INFLUENCE IN AFGHANISTAN

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HINDU EDIT MAY 16 WAS TYPICAL: "A MARXIST-LENIST PARTY NEED NOT NECESSARILY CARRY THE COMMUNIST LABEL: THERE ARE THE EXAMPLES OF POLAND AND GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC". EDITOR GIRILAL JAIN CHARACTERIZED IN THE TIMES OF INDIA MAY 3 THE SOVIET ROLE IN THE KABUL COUP AS "COMPLICATED." HE ARGUED "NO HARD EVIDENCE IS AVAILABLE OR IS LIKELY TO BE AVAILABLE IN THE NEAR FUTURE TO HELP CLINCH THE ISSUE ONE WAY OR THE OTHER." JAIN ALSO DECLARED THE US "HAS LOST THIS ROUND THE DECADES-OLD STRUGGLE FOR INFLUENCE IN AFGHANISTAN. BUT IK WOULD BE TRULY REMARKABLE IF IT HAS LOST WITHOUT TRYING TO RETAIN AND EXTEND ITS HOLD IN THAT COUNTRY. AFTER ALL, IT HAS SUCH ENORMOUS STAKES IN NEIGBHORING IRAN AND PAKISTAN."
3. NONE OF THE MAJOR NEWSPAPERS IN DELHI ASKED ITS CORRESPONDENTS TO GO TO AFGHANISTAN TO COVER THE DEVELOPMETS HERE. BUT GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED ALL INDIA RADIO SENT ITS TEHERAN CORRESPONDENT TO KABUL, WHO REPORTED MAY 15 THAT THE DAOUD GOVERNMENT COMPRISED A BUNCH OF "EXPLOITERS", THE PEOPLE WERE OVERJOYED BY ITS OVERTHROW AND THE COUP LEADERS HAD FULL PUBLIC SUPPORT. THE CORRESPONDENT'S OBVERSATION
S
WERE THE SUBJECT OF A HIGHLY CRITICAL TIMES OF INDIA MAY 18 EDITORIAL, "DOCTORED NEWS." "...SUCH UNTHINKING AND TOTAL ENDORSEMENT OF WHAT THE NEW LEADERTC CLAIM IS THE KIND OF STUFF OF WHICH POLITICAL PROPAGANDA, NOT OBJECTIVE REPORTING, IS MADE.
AT THIS RATE, EVERY TIME ONE SET OF
LEADERS REPLACES ANOTHER, THE NEW LOT WILL BE LAUDED AND THE EARLIER GROUP CONDEMNED TO PERDITION*"
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4. EDITORIAL REACTION OF LEFTIST PATRIOT WAS PREDICTABLE. IT DECLARED MAY 4 THAT THE "REVOLUTIONARY UPHEAVAL" IN KABUL "WAS MORE THAN A MILITARY ACTION OR COUP, THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC PARTY PROVIDED POLITICAL GUIDANCE AND A CONSIDERABLE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WERE IN THE STREETS WHEN
THE ATTACK ON THE PRESIDENT'S PALACE WAS LAUNCHED." REGRETTING THAT WASHINGTON DISAPPROVES OF THE NEW REGIME, THE EDIT CAUTIONED AFGHANISTAN'S "REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT WILL HAVE TO GUARD AGAINST POLITICAL SUBVERSION INSPIRED BY HOSTIL GOVERNMENTS." END LOU

B. BEGIN CONFIDENTIAL. CORRESPONDING TO THE ROUTINE COVERAGE ACCORDED THE COUP BY THE INDIAN PRESS, THE EMBASSY'S INDIAN CONTACTS, AND INDIAN POLITICIANS IN GENERAL, DO NOT APPEAR PARTICULARLY
INTEREST IN EVENTS IN AFGHANISTAN. THIS LACK OF INTEREST IS REFLECTED BY THE LACK OF QUESTIONS IN PARLIAMENT ABOUT THE COUP AND ITS EFFECT ON INDIANS LIVING IN AFGHANISTAN.

THAT SAID, THE GOI HAS OVER THE PAST TWO MONTHS BEEN PUBLICLY EMPHASIZING ITS DESIRE TO CONTINUE INDIA'S CLOSE AND FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH AFGHANISTAN. INDIA'S QUICK RECOGNITION

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OF THE NEW REGIME AND
FOREIGN SECRETARY MEHTA'S JUNE 22-24 VISIT TO KABUL REPRESENT
RESPECTIVELY THE FIRST AND THE LATEST MANIFESTATIONS OF GOI POLICY.
THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT MAINTAINS THAT THE APRIL 27 COUP IN AFGHANISTAN
IS THE INTERNAL AFFAIR OF THAT COUNTRY AND THAT IT NEED NOT CONSTITUTE

A SETBACK TO GROWING REGIONAL STABILITY AND COOPERATION (NEW
DELHI 8399). PRIVATELY, GOI OFFICIALS TELL US THAT WHILE THE
NEW REGIME MAY BE CLOSER TO THE SOVIETS THAN PREVIOUSLY,
AFGHANISTAN'S STRONG ISLAMIC TRADITION AND THE COUNTRY'S HSTORY
OF SUCCESSFULLY RESISTING FOREIGN ENCROACHMENTS WILL
PREVENT ANY COUNTRY FROM CONTROLLING THE GOVERNMENT IN KABUL.
AGAIN OFFICIAL, THE GOI EXPECTS AFGHANISTAN TO CONTINUE ITS
NON-ALIGNED FOREIGN POLICY (NEW DELHI 8980 AND JUNE 21 MEMCON
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WITH MEA JOINT SECRETARY DEO). HOWEVER, A FEW INDIAN POLITICANS NOT
IN THE GOVERNMENT HAVE TOLD US THAT THE COUP EFFECTIVELY "ALIGHNS"
NON-ALIGNED AFGHANISTAN WITH THE SOVIET UNION(MAY 19
MEMCON WITH MP RANJIT SINGH AND NEW DELHI'S A-135 OF JUNE 7,
1978).
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